C. A. Thayer

& the Pacific Lumber Schooners

by Roger Olmsted

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This history of the schooner C. A. Thayer *has been prepared by Roger Olmsted for the State of California, Division of Parks and Recreation, William Penn Mott, Director. The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Karl Kortum, Director of the San Francisco Maritime Museum, William Dillinger, State Parks Chief of Information and Interpretation, and Harry Dring, Supervisor of Maintenance and Restoration of the San Francisco State Maritime Historic Monument.*

This work is respectfully dedicated to the men and the ships and the great trees of the forests that built California.

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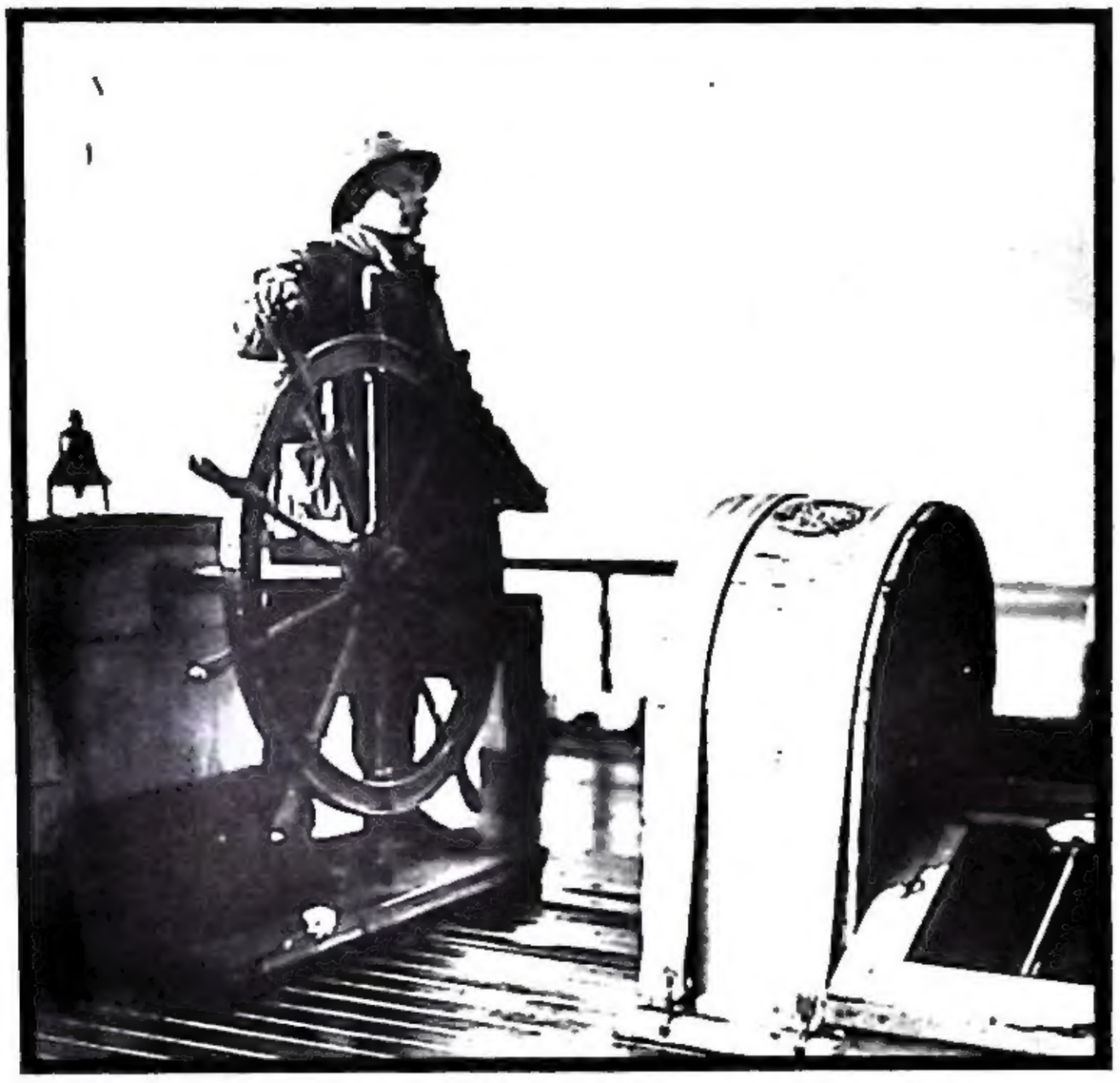
C. A. THAYER
and the
Pacific Lumber Schooners



From the *Daily Humboldt Standard*, July 9, 1895

"The bay boats were loaded with passengers this afternoon who went down to Bendixsen's shipyard to witness the launch of the new schooner *C. A. Thayer.* Soon after the boats arrived the ladders were taken in, and the work of removing the blocks was commenced. Miss Mabel Scott, of this city, christened the vessel, and as the crowd were waiting with bated breath the vessel started like a thing of life, and going faster and faster glided out on the water, its home for ever and ever. As the bow struck the water the bottle of champagne was broken and success and long life were wished the new-born vessel.

"The *C. A. Thayer* will be commanded by Captain Liljeqvist, formerly of the *Chas. Hansen.* The vessel was built for the E. K. Wood Lumber Company. She will run between Grays Harbor and San Francisco in the lumber trade. The length is 156 feet, breadth 36, and the depth 11.8. The gross tonnage is 452.29."

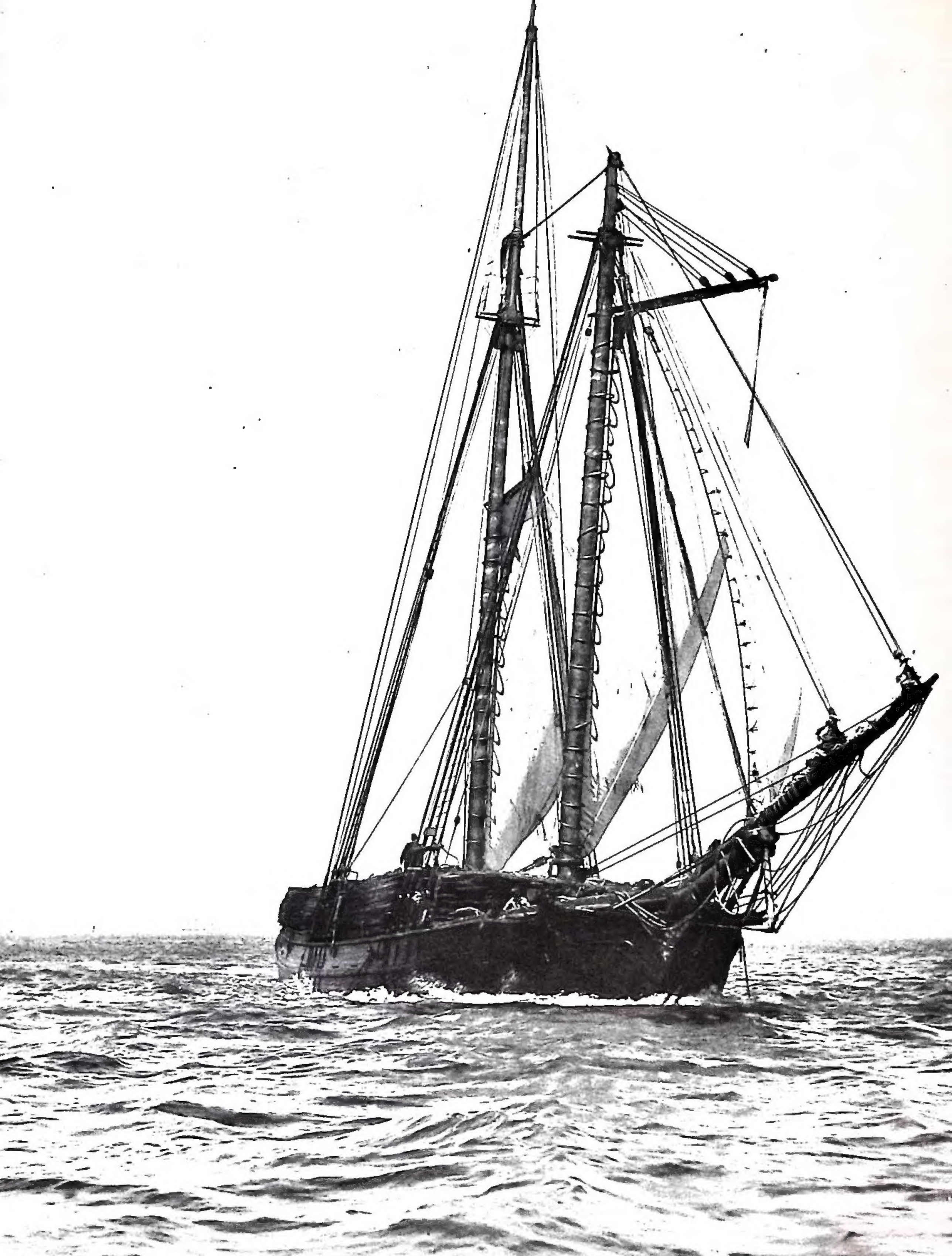
"For ever and ever" is a long time, and on that summer's day in 1895 there was certainly no reason for a Eureka reporter to think that there was anything extraordinary about H. D. Bendixsen's eighty-sixth vessel, a baldheaded three-mast schooner not especially remarkable for either size or cost. Yet the *Thayer* indeed was destined to a career that with each passing year brought her closer and closer to establishing herself as the archetype of the West Coast sailing vessel.

The *Thayer* not only plied her coastal run, but made her share of passages to Mexico, Honolulu, Fiji, and Australia. When sailing lumber schooners fell on hard times she was put to work in the booming salmon trade of Western Alaska, carrying men and supplies north each spring and returning with the pack in the fall. Later, like several of her sisters, she was outfitted as a Bering Sea codfisherman. Finally the day came when she was the last commercial vessel under sail on the Pacific Coast. Still her good fortune held: even before she made her last voyage to the Bering Sea her name figured in plans for a maritime museum in San Francisco. Restored by the Department of Parks and Recreation of the State of California, the *Thayer* became a National Historic Landmark in 1966. The careless remark of a small town newspaperman on the day of her launch is now official policy of the people of California and the United States — the *Thayer* is to ride proudly in her element, forever.

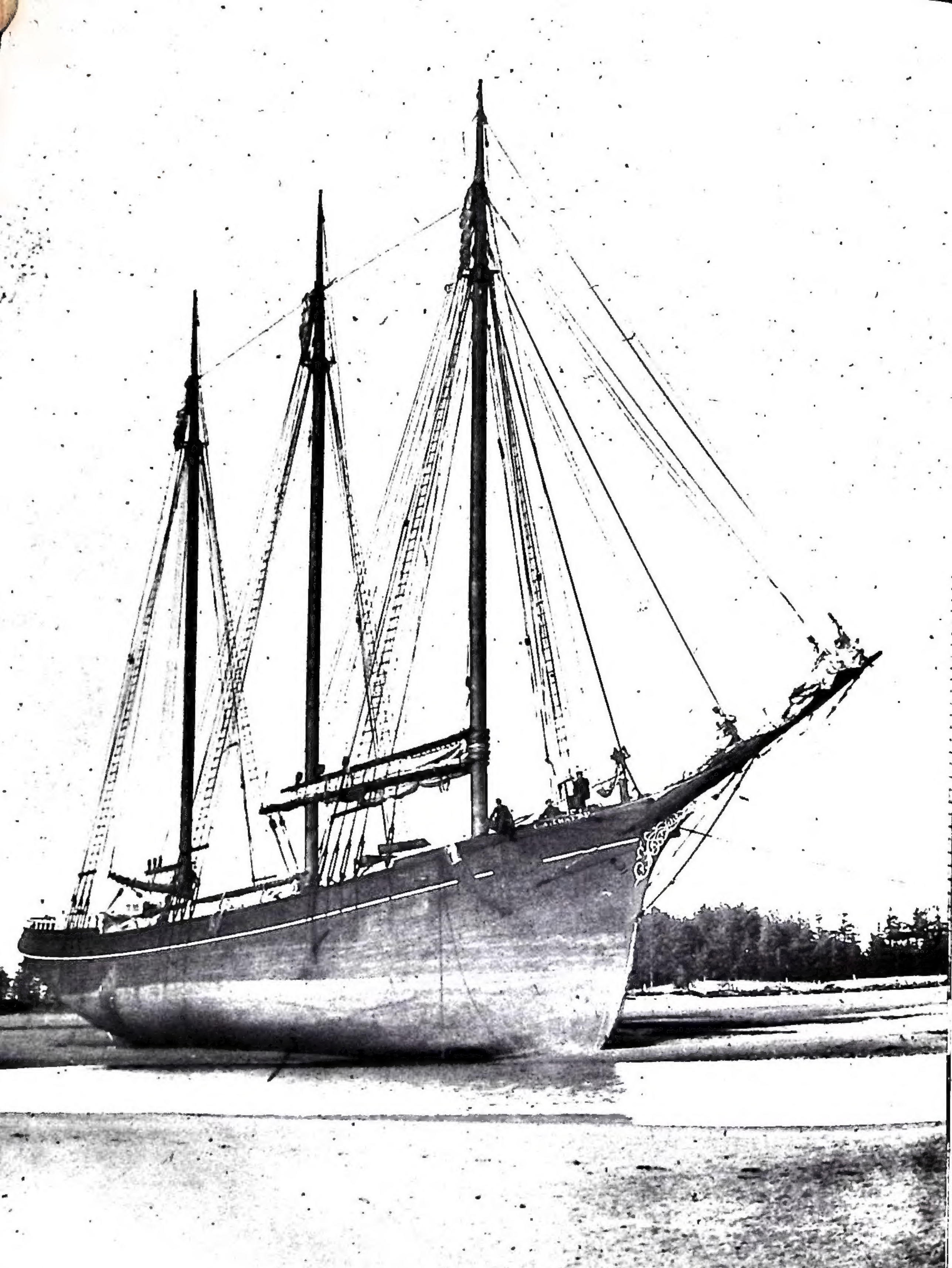
The *C. A. Thayer* survives as a monument to the days of sail on the Pacific Coast, to the art of West Coast shipbuilding, and to the amazing forests of Northern California and the Pacific Northwest. In 1850, the strange economics of Gold Rush California dictated that it was cheaper to import lumber from New England — 13,000 miles by way of Cape Horn — than to get building materials out of comparatively nearby forests that sprouted timber of a size to all but unhinge the mind of an Eastern lumberman. This curious situation could not last long, and before the end of the 1850's a Pacific Coast lumber industry, centered around tidewater locations from the Redwood Coast of California north to Puget Sound, was beginning to thrive. During the early years, aging East Coast-built ships were as cheap as lumber was dear, and all kinds of available vessels were pressed into service. But as the industry became more rational the need for efficient lumber carriers, vessels built especially for the trade, became greater.

The Redwood Coast, with its timber everywhere close to the sea but with no real harbors south of Humboldt Bay, called for handy two-masted schooners that could work out of the "dog holes" that served as loading points. San Francisco builders responded to the need to produce such craft and on the Mendocino Coast itself T. H. Petersen launched schooners from places that today we would think it most unlikely, if not impossible, to build a ship. Bigger schooners caught on with the development of the lumber industry in Oregon and Washington, the three-masters becoming common in the 1870's with four and even five-masters appearing in the late 1880's. Altogether, more than 500 wooden sailing vessels of more than 100 tons were built on the Pacific Coast between 1860 and 1905.

The building material of the West Coasters was the Douglas fir. To the surprise of seamen and builders used to the oak-ribbed ships of New England, Douglas fir turned out to be one of the finest all-around shipbuilding timbers ever seen, for it proved suitable for all structural parts of a ship: keel and frames, planking and beams, decks and spars. The treenail fastenings would be of Eastern locust,



The schooner Big River, *named for the stream cutting through the redwood country back of Mendocino City, is a classic example of the early two-masters built for the lumber trade.*



The C. A. Thayer *ashore after a bad pounding in the surf at the entrance to Grays Harbor in November, 1903.*

and there would be bits of hardwood at points that took chafe, and if the vessel were built on Humboldt Bay there might be redwood paneling in the cabin, but all the rest was fir. Thus the schooners grew right out of the forests they were built to carry to market.

The design requirements of sailing vessels are peculiarly unrelenting, and the case of lumber ships was no exception. One can build an apartment house much to suit any fancy, and in fact styles change from decade to decade. But ships like the *Thayer* were the final products of brief but intensive experimentation. The West Coast lumber carrier had to carry a bulky cargo of comparatively low value in one direction, and sail back with no cargo at all. These requirements called for a vessel that could be worked easily with the smallest possible crew, that could lift an immense load, and could beat up the coast into the prevailing northwesterly winds without ballast. As voyages were generally short — two weeks or so — the vessels had to be easy to load with lumber and it would not pay to have to load and discharge ballast in connection with the return trip.

The *Thayer* is an excellent expression of the results of these design requirements. While a medium-sized schooner of the period, she is about at the limit of size for a three-master; any larger and she would have to have been four-masted. She is about three times the tonnage of a good-sized two-masted schooner and could carry more than three times as much lumber — 575,000 board feet. Yet she operated with a crew of only four seamen, two mates, a cook, and the captain. This gave her a mate and two seamen for each watch — no more than you would expect on a forty-foot ocean racing yacht today. Although she has 106-foot masts, her simple rig without topmasts ("baldheaded") made her easy to work. About half of the cargo was stowed in the hold, the rest on deck. The *Thayer* and her sisters in the trade were sailing vessels to please a seaman's eye and warm an accountant's heart.

When the *C. A. Thayer* was built, the idea of a good ship in a good trade was quite a bit more personal than it is today. Shares in a lumber schooners were ordinarily divided into as little as sixty-fourths, and in the case of the *Thayer* - E. K. Wood Lumber Co., the managing owner, held only $\frac{1}{16}$. The captain of the schooner held a like interest. H. D. Bendixsen held ¼, an unusually large share for the builder, explained in this case by the fact that the *C. A. Thayer* was the first vessel he had launched since the onset of the depression of 1893. It would appear that Bendixsen was investing heavily in order to get his business moving again. Then there were fifteen other shareholders, all of them probably relatives, friends, or business associates of the builder or E. K. Wood partners or else prospective associates in the operation of the vessel, such as ship chandlers or grocers. Clarence A. Thayer, partner and secretary of E. K. Wood Co., was not among the shareholders.

There had been a big boom in the lumber and coastal shipping business in the 1880's when the first Southern California real estate craze was at its peak, and there were good times ahead with the even greater boom of the early years of this century, a boom compounded by the tremendous demand for lumber generated by the rebuilding of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake and fire. At the same time there was new competition for the lumber schooners in the rapidly developing "steam schooner" type. By the time that the *Thayer* was built, these small steamers had taken over much of the traffic to the rocky Redwood Coast; bigger steam schooners, with a carrying capacity as great or greater than the

lumber, there was not much to sink except the galley stove, the donkey engine — and the crew.

Laid up in Oakland with a $9,000 salvage claim against her, the *Thayer* no longer looked a desirable investment as a lumber ship. Peter M. Nelson, operator of small salmon salteries at Bristol Bay in Western Alaska was expanding his business and was in the market for a ship to transport his men and supplies north in the spring and to bring back the barreled salt salmon at the end of the season. "Whitehead Pete" Nelson bought the *Thayer* for about $10,000, and between 1912 and 1924 (when Nelson sold out his salteries) she served him very well sailing to Igushik and Squaw Creek. The *Thayer* was more of a family ship than ever, with Mrs. Nelson, Hilda, and little Rudolph sometimes going north for the season. Mrs. Nelson did the cooking one season at the saltery, but she never cooked aboard, "Because I get seasick and I get in bed," she said. "Even when there was no storm. One time there was a storm. The cabin had a sofa and a rocking chair and some kind of bureau — nice furniture. And they got loose, and come roaring in. And I cried. And Rudolph says, 'Mama, don't you cry! I'll dance the klip-klop for you. . . .' But she was a pretty dry little ship — in weather like that she was all right."

With the skyrocketing shipping rates of the First World War, Nelson could hardly resist the temptation to send the *Thayer* on transpacific voyages during the off season. The schooner could just comfortably make the round trip to Australia between the end of September and the beginning of April, carrying

The waterfront at San Francisco.

lumber outbound and coal or copra returning. Captain Ole Lee commanded the *Thayer* on the last of her Australian trips, that of 1918-1919. He told the story of that voyage to San Francisco Maritime Museum interviewers in 1957:

"In 1918 Pete Nelson asked me if I would take the *C. A. Thayer* to Australia. He said I could take the wife and kid and he agreed to pay me $250 a month — big wages for a schooner captain. The most important thing on a long voyage is that you have plenty of potatoes. I told Pete that I wanted the best they had. I saw to stowing them myself — put them on shelves back in the lazarette and covered them with slaked lime to keep them from sprouting. We had fresh potatoes out and all the way back to the pilot at San Francisco.

"We went up to Fort Bragg the first of October, 1918. Loaded beautiful redwood lumber. It blew up an awful storm while we were loading — so bad that we had to leave the ship one night. We were moored by chain to a big rock, but waves were breaking right over the dock. If you had steam in a place like Fort Bragg you got out when it started to blow, but with a schooner there was nothing to do but hang on. That was almost the last of the *C. A. Thayer.*

"In those days the master and mates would load the ship. I would be down in the hold, seeing to it that we could get in as much as possible, seeing that I got lumber in between the beams. In the hold you built up the load so that it followed the sheer of the vessel; that way all of the space would be filled. But on deck you took the sheer out of her, so that the top of the load was flat. That's an art that is forgotten.

"We made Sydney in 65 days, a good average passage, and discharged 575,000 feet of lumber into lighters at Johnsons Bay. We sailed from Sydney on January 9, 1919, with copra and a little hardwood. We ran south around New Zealand to pick up those strong westerlies and ran into a terrific storm from the south. One night when we were close reefed the fore and main throat halyards carried away. We got the main up again, but the fore gaff was broken. I got the cargo gaff out, but it was too heavy and we had to lower it again. We got some hardwood battens and we worked three or four days fishing the gaff nicely; it was finally as light and strong as new.

"We made good time as far as Pitcairn Island, but then we were becalmed for 30 days. That's why it took us 85 days to San Francisco. One day off the Mexican coast a squall took the foresail and forestaysail right out of the boltropes. Our sails were five years old. My job was sewing all the time, every day. That's all I done."

With the wartime boom over and salt salmon fast becoming a product of the past, the 1920's did not bode favorably for the *Thayer.* With Pete Nelson's retirement in 1924 the odds were that her career was over. After all, thirty years was a reasonable life expectancy for a wooden ship. Yet the old schooner's luck held, and she was bought by J. E. Shields, part-owner, manager, and salesman for the Pacific Coast Codfishing Company of Poulsbo, Washington.

The Pacific codfishery centered on several banks on either side of the Alaska Peninsula. Old lumber schooners made excellent vessels for this trade because they were big, cheap, and easy to handle. Unlike the famous Gloucestermen of New England, the Pacific codfishermen were not market boats but tenders and transports for a six months' cruise. The *Thayer* and her sisters would sail from San Francisco and Puget Sound in April for the Bering sea with a cargo of salt and thirty or more men. With perhaps only one brief visit to the Alaska shore in

the summer to take on water, they would keep at sea until either they were full of salted codfish or were forced home by the onset of winter. Fishing alone from his dory in the boisterous and foggy Bering Sea and living for six months in a cramped and foul fo'c'sle, the codfisherman led a dangerous and grueling life. Jimmy Crooks, who has left us a record of his single codfishing voyage, remarked, "The hold of a slaver could not have been much worse than the quarters I found on the schooner *Fanny Dutard* during the year 1926."

"Under my contract as fisherman I was not entitled to any base wage, but would be paid at the rate of one-and-a-half cents a pound for the fish that I caught — that is, after the fish were cleaned, salted, and of course the head and backbone removed, and provided that the fish were delivered safely in the United States. It soon became obvious that I would have to catch one hell of a lot of fish to even make wages corresponding to the lowest paid laborer ashore, and that the story which the owner of the vessel had painted for me before I signed on was a bird of a different feather. Had I inspected the vessel before signing the Articles of Agreement, it is doubtful if I would ever have made the voyage at all, but a crafty shipowner had taken that into consideration, and like all newcomers to the industry I was not taken aboard until after the vessel had been hauled away from the dock. The launch which carried me out to the schooner where she lay temporarily at anchor did not linger alongside, but returned to the shore immediately, in case somebody might change his mind. However, there was some delay before the schooner departed while the owner negotiated with the local police authorities to have some skilled codfishermen released from the drunk tank to make their annual voyage to the codfishing grounds of the Bering Sea — a not unusual delay, I was later to learn. . . . For a person to make a second voyage on one of these schooners it would be almost necessary for him to be under the influence of liquor, and life in a city jail could not have been a harsher form of punishment than life on board a Bering Sea codfisherman."

The *C. A. Thayer's* first codfishing skipper was a famous Puget Sound old-timer, John Grotle. Under his command she made seven consecutive voyages, on the last of which, in 1931, she returned with 302,000 fish — the largest catch that an American schooner had brought back from the Bering Sea up to that time. The payday for her fishermen would have been vastly larger than the $300 that poor Jimmy Crooks made for his six months' work. Yet after that great 1931 season a decline in salt cod prices led to the *Thayer* being laid up in Lake Union for the rest of the decade.

The U.S. Army rescued the decaying *C. A. Thayer* in 1942. The Army cut the masts out of her and put her to use as a lowly barge in British Columbia and Southeastern Alaska waters. But the Army also spent quite a bit of money on repair of her hull. When J. E. Shields bought her back in 1945 he had a good schooner with no rig. In another of his vessels, the *Sophie Christenson*, he had a rotten hull but a sound rig. With characteristic ingenuity he pulled out three of the *Sophie's* four masts and her bowsprit and installed them in the *Thayer*. Fitted out with masts from a topmast schooner (but without the topmasts), with iron "extender" bars filling out shrouds that were too short, and with her gaff foresail and main complemented by a leg-of-mutton mizzen, the *Thayer* was among the ugliest ducklings ever to sail from a Pacific port. But "The codfish don't care" was Shields' motto, and that was good enough for the *Thayer* until 1950 and the end of the codfishing industry.

Captain Gus Peterson of the C. A. Thayer *and his bride.*

In 1948 Karl Kortum (who with Harry Dring and several other young West Coast sailing ship enthusiasts had voyaged around Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope to Australia in the last American square-rigger) formulated the concept of a monument in San Francisco devoted to the preservation of the maritime heritage of the Pacific Coast. This idea included saving a lumber schooner, a steam schooner, a scow schooner, a riverboat, and a "Cape Horner," together with the preparation of a museum devoted to coastal maritime history.

By 1951 San Francisco had its maritime museum, and four years later the *Balclutha* — a full-rigged ship built for the California grain trade — lay in a berth at Fisherman's Wharf. But the fulfillment of the plan called for greater resources than those available to a maritime society or to the city of San Francisco. At the urging of the Maritime Museum, the California State Legislature in 1955 appropriated $200,000 for the purchase and repair of a sailing schooner and a steam schooner. The State saw the need for action; of the once-great fleet of coastal vessels only two schooners and one steam schooner were in anything like restorable condition. The initial appropriation was backed up by a total of $2,000,000 — enough to create a maritime park at the Hyde Street Pier in San Francisco.

When the State bought the *C. A. Thayer* it was known that she was in no shape to be safely towed to California. Working as a consultant, Harold Huycke, an experienced seaman and maritime historian, undertook to refit the ship at Seattle for the voyage to her original home port. The need for new masts, and the availability of such timber only in the Northwest, suggested a refit more extensive than that first planned, and the result was that the *Thayer* came out of the Puget Sound shipyards able to make the coastwise passage under her own sail. Harlan Trott has documented that last sailing passage of the *C. A. Thayer* most delightfully in his book, *The Schooner That Came Home*. Captain Raynaud, who had done the survey work on the vessel, commanded the schooner on her voyage to San Francisco. Jack Dickerhoff, later chief rigger for the State Park, was mate; Harry Dring, later supervisor of maintenance and restoration on the *Thayer*, was donkeyman; Huycke was bo'sun; and many others who had helped the cause of the ship filled out the crew.

Years of patient work by skilled workmen went into the *Thayer* before she was opened to the public at the Hyde Street Pier in October of 1963. Realizing that the long-run maintenance and restoration of the *C. A. Thayer* and the other vessels in the Maritime Park could not be accomplished by one-shot contracts with shipyards, the Department of Parks and Recreation employed a staff of permanent shipwrights and other specialists who today comprise perhaps the most experienced ship restoration gang in the world. The work took longer this way — but it cost less and was done right. We are sure that the codfish didn't care, but there is good reason to believe that the public, today and in future generations, does and will care.

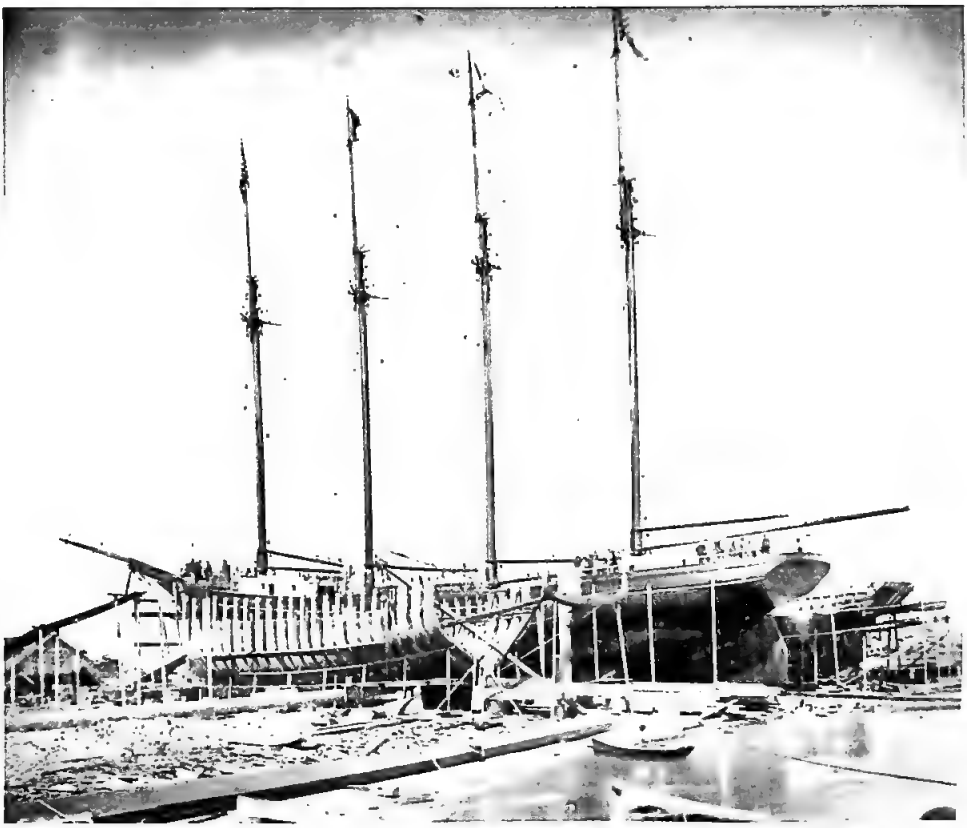
The lines of a West Coaster. . . . On the drydock the *C. A. Thayer* shows the pleasing waterlines and easy run of a well designed lumber carrier.

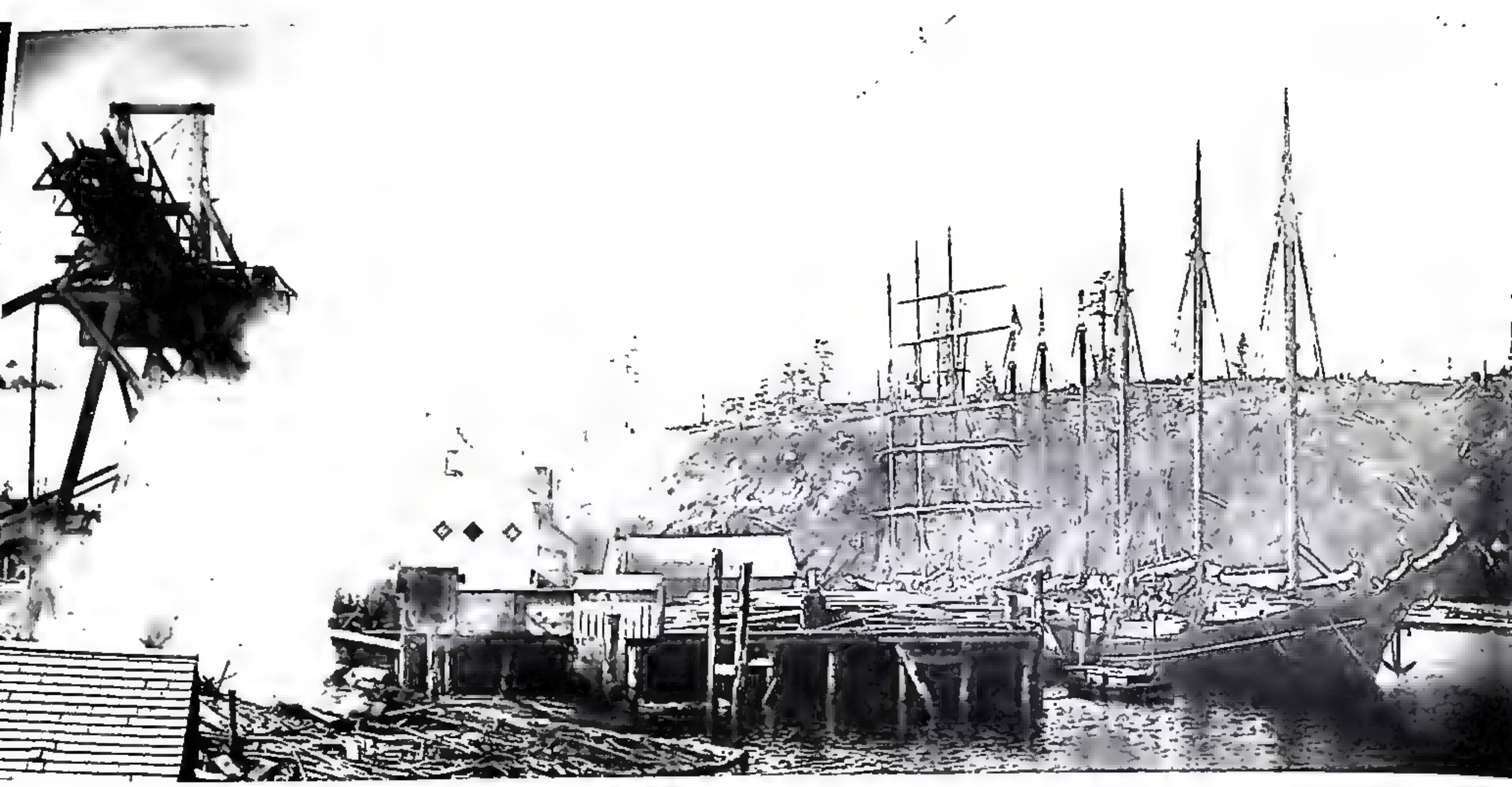
One hundred and ten wooden vessels, most of them schooners, came out of the Bendixsen yards at Eureka and at Fairhaven on the shores of Humboldt Bay. The shipyard office, seen above, was a working archive of lumber-carrier models. The *C. A. Thayer* was the fifteenth (and not the last) hull built from one of these half models, as it was common practice simply to vary the dimensions of a successful shape to meet the tonnage requirements of the customer.

At the left is Hans Ditlev Bendixsen, one of the Pacific Coast's master builders. Bendixsen was born in Denmark in 1842 and was as a youth apprenticed to shipbuilders in Aalborg and Copenhagen. He came to San Francisco in 1863, worked in shipyards there, and in the late 1860's found employment in the yard of E. and H. Cousins at Eureka. In 1869 he started his own yard, building the little schooner *Fairy Queen* for the Sacramento River trade. He built a number of schooners for the Tahiti trade at Eureka, then moved across the narrow bay to a site he called Fairhaven. With Matthew Turner of

Benicia and the Hall brothers of Port Blakeley, Washington, Bendixsen may take a great deal of credit for establishing the quality of wooden shipbuilding on the West Coast.

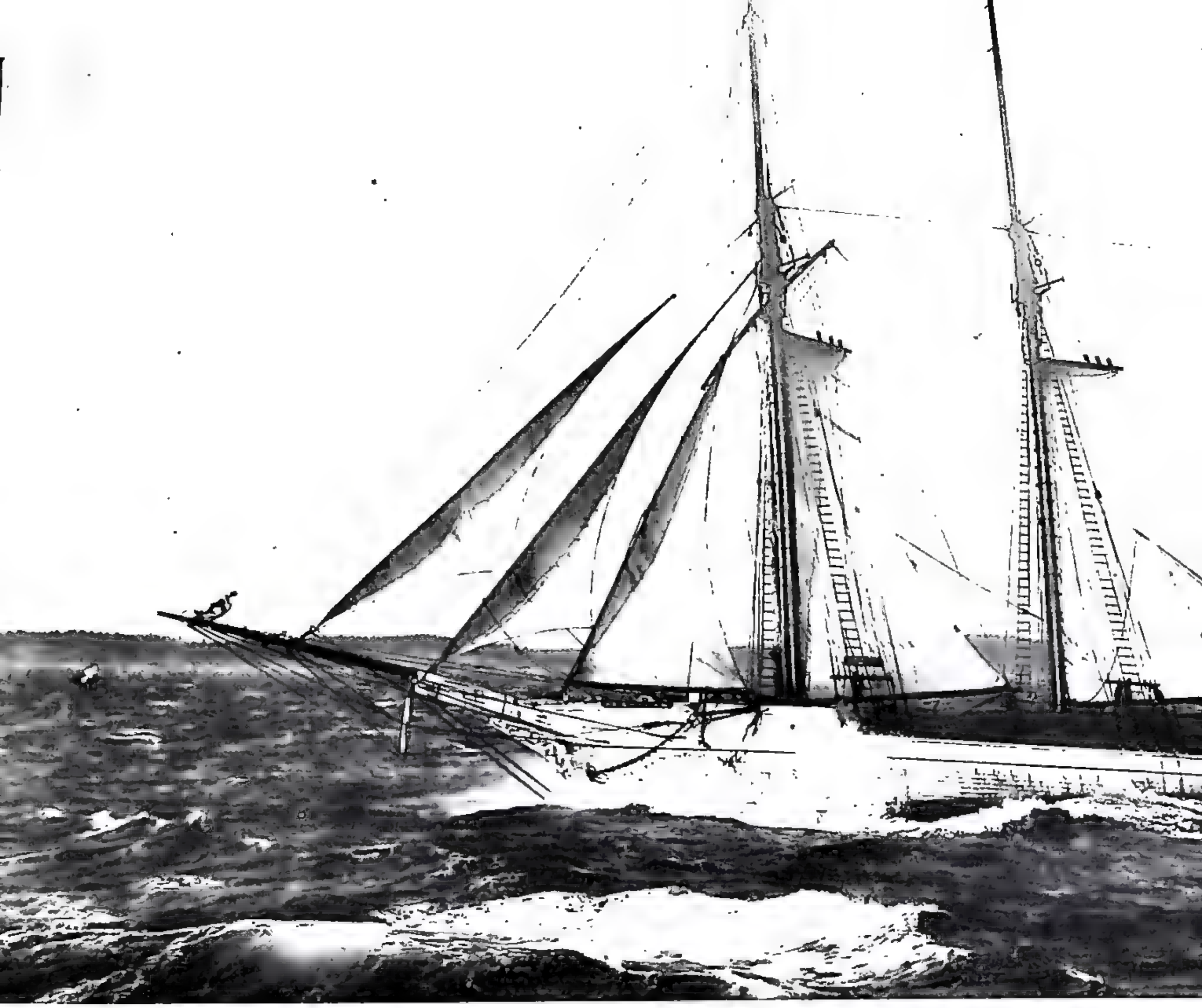
Below is a launching day at the Fairhaven yard. The date is October, 1891, and the big four-master *R. W. Bartlett* is ready to go down the ways, masts stepped, running rigging rove off, all ready for a crew to bend the sails. Beyond her is the three-master *Czarina*, launched in December. In the foreground the *Charles R. Wilson*, which in later years served with the *Thayer* in the Pacific Coast Codfish Company fleet, is being set up in frame. At the right is Clarence A. Thayer, who with Wood and other partners came out from Michigan to develop the timber resources of the Pacific Northwest.





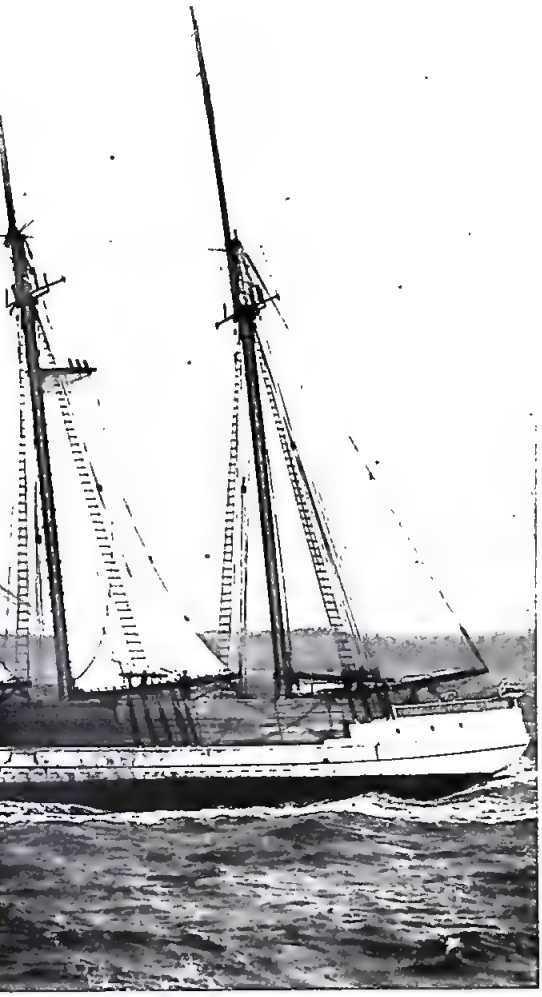
Hoquiam, Washington, at the head of Grays Harbor, might have had better reason to be called the *Thayer's* home port than San Francisco, for she always loaded at the E. K. Wood mill there, but frequently sailed to ports other than San Francisco. Above is the Northwest Lumber Company mill and wharf at Hoquiam. Loading is the three-master *Lucy*, a second three-master, and the barkentine *North Bend*. At the right, above, the *Thayer* is fully loaded at the E. K. Wood wharf, preparing to sail from Hoquiam to Honolulu. Capt. Fred Scott is taking his wife and a friend on what promises to be a pleasant voyage.

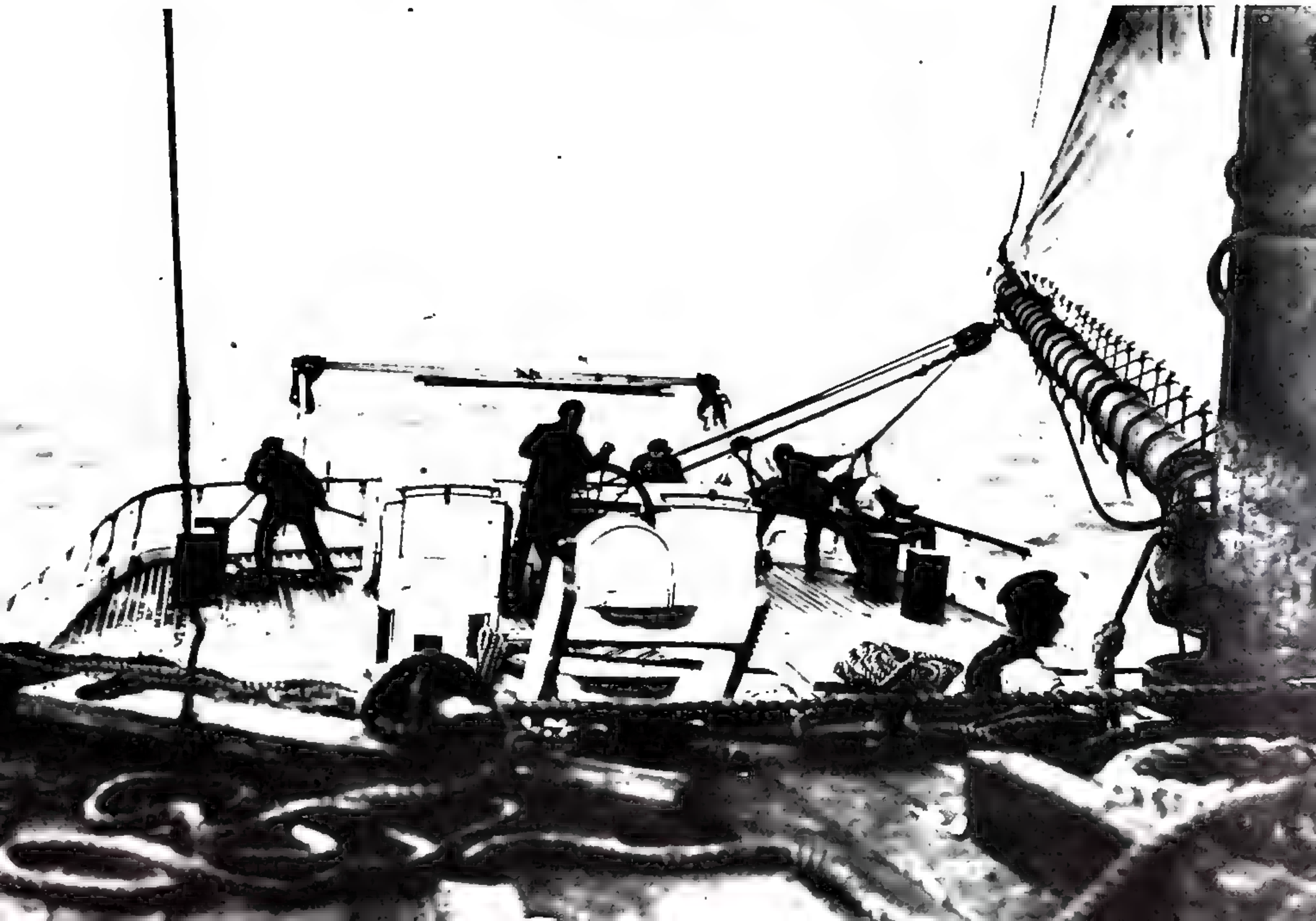
At the right, the schooner *Okanagan* discharges at the Pope & Talbot yard in San Francisco. Loading and discharging was a long process, as the ship's small crew handled the donkey engine and made up the sling loads of lumber. For this reason they were paid more in port than at sea. On a 1904 voyage to Honolulu seaman were paid $35 a month at sea, $40 in port. The donkeyman got an extra $5.00. The cook was paid $60, the second mate $50, the chief mate $60. The coasters were noted among deepwatermen as "good feeders" and they had little trouble making up their crews.

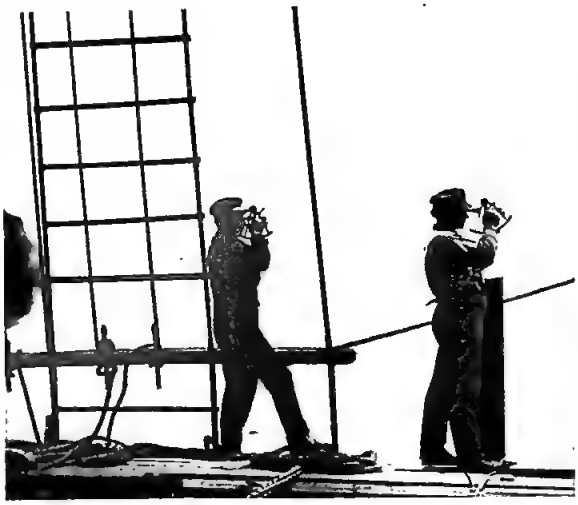


A classic West Coaster. . . . At the right is Captain C. W. Liljeqvist, first master of the *C. A. Thayer*, with the mates and crew of the four-master *Fearless*, his next command under the E. K. Wood house flag. The *Fearless* seems as though moored in the middle of a forest. Her neatly-stowed deckload is about ten feet high. Above, the *Fearless* departs Puget Sound with a full cargo and a bone in her teeth. The *Thayer* sometimes carried a yard on the foremast, as the *Fearless* does here; the West Coast style of setting this sail was unusual, but handy — it furled in to the mast much like a drapery, as can be seen here, instead of up to the yard, square-rigger fashion. West Coast lumber schooners came in white, black, and gray and white, with the black hull and yellow trim of the *Thayer* being the most popular. But codfishermen favored the bottle green popular in smaller workcraft, and the *Thayer* ended her commercial career in this color.

Liljeqvist was an appropriate name for the *Thayer's* first master, for up through the end of her salmon-packing days she was a true ship of the Coast's "Scandinavian Navy." After Liljequist was Ole Monsen, and subsequently there were such as Gus Peterson, Erik Ingman, Adolf Peterson, Oscar Jacobson, Ole Lee, John Anderson, Emil Anderson. . . .

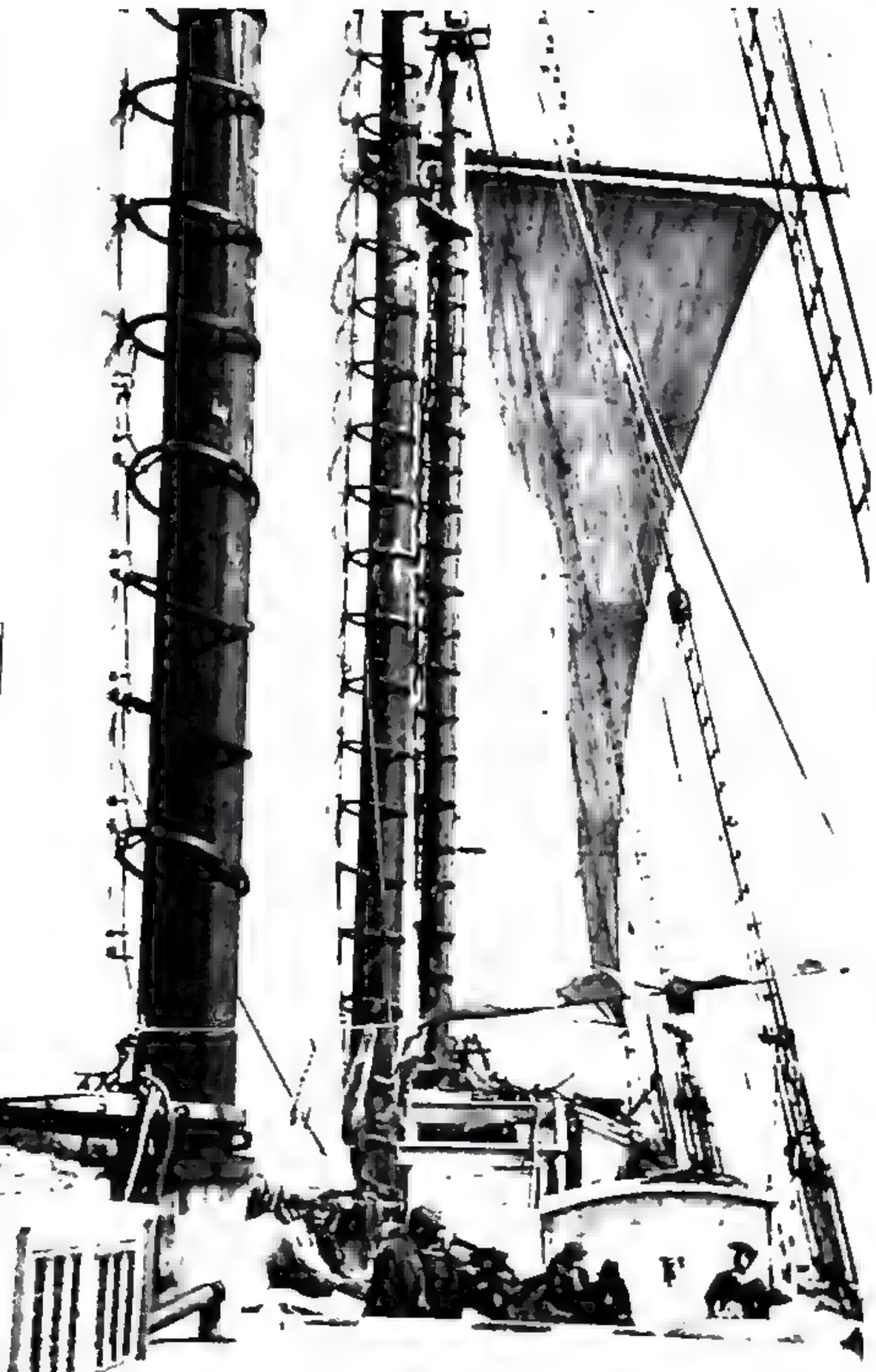






The photographs on this page (and the shot on page 1) were made aboard the four-masted schooner *Admiral* on a twenty-seven day voyage from Everett, Washington, to San Diego in June of 1905. At the upper left, the *Admiral* is on a close reach in a brisk breeze. The chains and turnbuckles used to secure the deckload show clearly in the foreground.

In the view below, most of the crew turn to for a stout heave on the jigger sheet. Captain Oberg and his mate are seen taking the noon sight above — while at the right the amateur photographer has captured a most unusual view a second after the mate has tripped the anchor. The pelican hook holding the anchor to the small chain at the cathead has just been whacked open by a blow from the topmaul. The anchor drops free, though secured through the hawse-pipe to the anchor chain. The voyage has ended: now to wait for a berth and spend two or three weeks unloading the lumber.

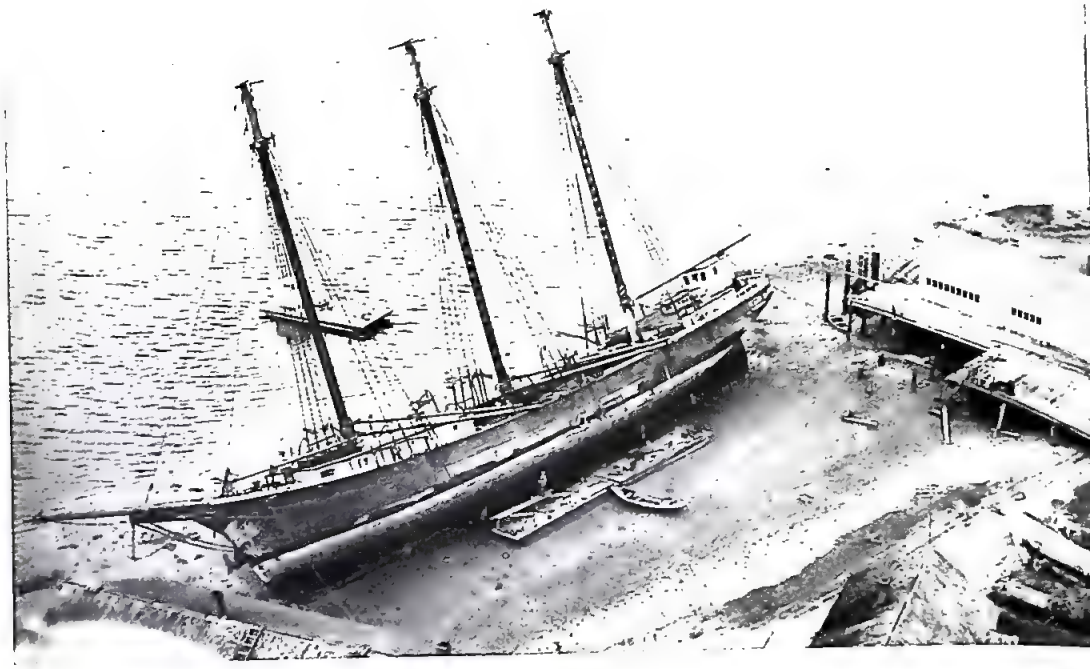


Family ships. . . . Square-rigger captains in the Cape Horn trades often took their wives to sea and sometimes their children, but when they didn't, it was frequently a year or more before they would see their families again. One of the attractions of the lumber schooners was that a master mariner could maintain a home ashore that he could expect to visit frequently. When he took his wife to sea, it was in the nature of a vacation, a regular and pleasant change from the routine ashore or afloat.

When the *Thayer* ran to Peter Nelson's Alaskan salteries, he often brought the family along for a month's cruise either way — and a no doubt hectic two months of fishing and pickling a year's catch in forbidding Bristol Bay. At the left is the *Thayer* heading for

Alaska in about 1914, her squaresail set (Pete kept up his ships in good style) and the laundry flying. With the fishermen and saltery men aboard there were plenty of hands to make light work.

The *Thayer* had no births aboard — but Gus Peterson, seen with Victorian baby carriage and offspring — was married on the *Thayer* and the Fred Scott's honeymooned on a voyage to Hawaii. Ole Lee's son learned to walk during a passage to Australia. The piano is part of the furnishings of the big schooner *Blakeley*. Quite a few vessels had a little organ, and below we see Otto and Hulda Lembke aboard the *Comet* in the early years of the Victrola. The cabin of the *Comet* is a neat blend of seagoing utility and the feminine touch.

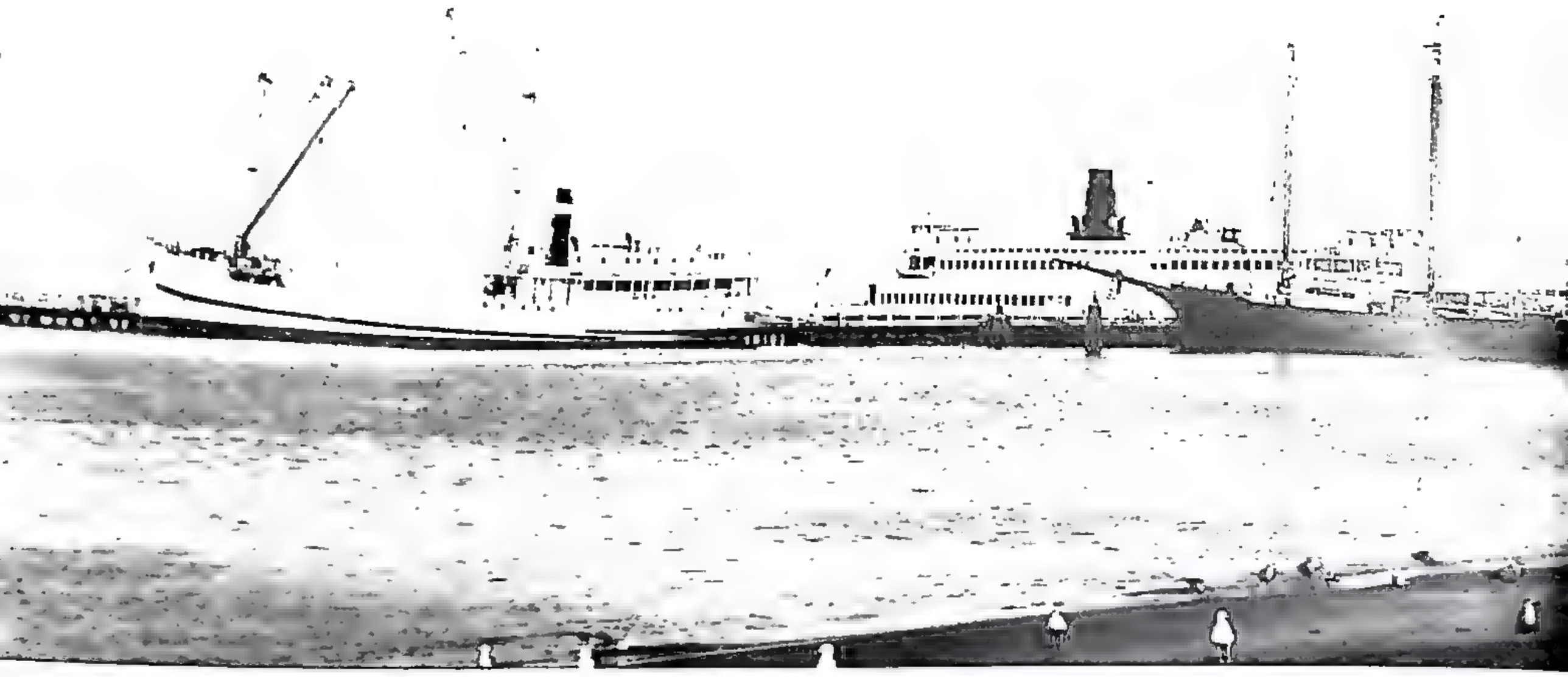


From codfisherman to "pirate ship" . . . At left is the *C. A. Thayer* towing into Poulsbo at the end of the 1948 codfishing season. To the end, the only significant modernization in the methods of codfishing was the introduction of outboard motors for the dories in the late 1920's and 1930's. In most respects the industry belonged to a different age than did post-World War II America. Keeping up the last of the codfisherman was a way of the past, too: why spend money for a drydock when you can careen her on a convenient beach? Below the final humiliation: the *Thayer* is a shoddy tourist attraction on a gravel bar at the head of Hood Canal just before she is rescued by the State of California.

Restoring a schooner. . . . Restoration of old wooden sailing vessels is a tricky and sometimes surprising business. While most people would think that the bottom is the most sensitive spot, the fact is that ships are pretty good at what they are built for — which in part is to keep water from coming through the bottom. Topside, where rainwater gets through crevices (after all, a ship's deck can't be built like a barn roof) the trouble starts. And when you start to pick away at a few soft planks you are apt to find worse and worse. A little probing into a little rot around the stern at Lake Union Drydock in May of 1957 turned into this $10,000 job you see at the left as bucketsfull of punk wood came out. Parts of the taffrail, bull rail, covering board, decking, planking, frames, beams, and ceiling, together with the whole horn timber have been removed. Still not too bad for a veteran of sixty years' service.

At the top right, the author, serving as a consultant for the State, is watching a minor case of the same "Where do you stop?" problem. In the center some badly damaged planking at the waterline (which had been repaired by her "pirate ship" entrepeneur with a mixture of dungarees, rags, rope, and plywood) is replaced at Lake Union Drydock. At the bottom Charlie Nelson, caulker (and thus practioner of one of the most ancient and respected maritime arts) drives twisted strands of oakum into the beveled seams of the *Thayer's* cabin roof. Caulking is either done right — or it is something worse than a disappointment.

Big work, little work — all of it careful work. . . . Below the whole stem is opened up in 1969; at right the whole shipwright gang pays the cabin seams, Bristol fashion, with white compound.



The living ships at Hyde Street Pier: The steam schooner *Wapama*, the San Francisco Bay ferryboat *Eureka*, and the three-masted schooner *C. A. Thayer* ride at their Aquatic Park moorings. Their like will never be seen again.

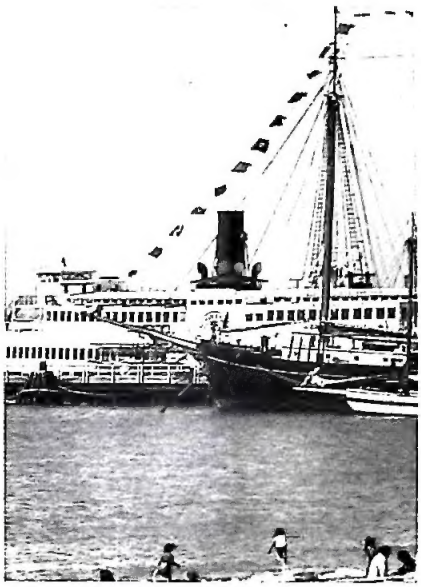
At the right, the *C. A. Thayer* sails for Alaska on April 12, 1912. "Whitehead Pete" Nelson, her new owner, took a party of friends and suppliers for a San Francisco Bay outing aboard his new tugboat, *Rudolph N.*, before towing the *Thayer* to sea.

The departure did not go unsung. As the *Rudolph N.* dropped her tow and the *Thayer* set off under full sail for her 3,500-mile voyage to Western Alaska, one of the ladies aboard the *Rudolph* composed verses thought suitable to the occasion:

To the *Thayer* we bid adieu,
To Mrs. Nelson and the crew,
To the Golden Gate, then through,
Out to sea our parting view. . . .

Three cheers then to the *Thayer!*
And to her our tribute pay her;
And never a day shall be gayer,
Then this sailing day of the *Thayer.*

Ghosting down the Pacific shore in a light breeze, the *C. A. Thayer* heads for her home port in October, 1957.



Sources and Credits —

The major source for the history of the West Coast schooners and the *C. A. Thayer* is in the interviews, reports, and notes collected or prepared by the San Francisco Maritime Museum over the last two decades. Special acknowledgement is due John Lyman, whose statistical surveys and notes on West Coast ships and shipbuilding (appearing in his periodical publication, *Log Chips*) are invaluable. The photographic record of these ships is to be found in the files of the San Francisco Maritime Museum. Robert A. Weinstein is deserving of special credit for his volunteer contributions to this large and growing archive.

Photo credits: cover, Karl Kortum, aboard the *C. A. Thayer* at sea in 1957; p. 1, Robert A. Weinstein; p. 3, Bancroft Library; pp. 6 and 7, Robert A. Weinstein; pp. 13, and 16, pp. 20 and 21, Robert A. Weinstein; Harry Dring; p. 26, Harold Huycke; p. 27 (top) Karl Kortum, (center) Harold Huycke, (bottom) Harry Dring; p. 28, Harry Dring; p. 29 (top) Harry Dring, (bottom) Karl Kortum; p. 31 (top) Roger Olmsted; p. 32, Karl Kortum. All other photos courtesy of San Francisco Maritime Museum.

After rounding Cape Horn, I thought to myself, there must be some other place on earth where seafaring is more pleasant. I found it. Life on a Pacific Coast lumber schooner was not so bad and the fo'c'sle in most of them was snug and dry. They were good sea boats when loaded and you kept your feet dry. It was kind of eerie when reefing down in a rising gale, the schooner heeling way over, the water rushing along and lapping over the top of the deckload to lee. But everybody knew his work and it was done in no time at all. For a while, I thought the sailing ships would last me all my life, but I was mistaken.

— Captain Fred K. Klebingat

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